

The Congressional Issue Monitor

Congressman Jim Nussle

Manchester, Iowa

Summer 2001

Jim Nussle's Agenda for Iowa...

- ***Strengthening
the Family Farm***
- ***Eliminate Debt,
Lower Taxes &
Responsible Budgets***
- ***Long-term
Energy Strategy
Promoting
Renewable Sources
& Conservation***
- ***Retirement
Security for All
Iowans***
- ***Modernize
Medicare with
Prescription Drugs***
- ***Leave No Child
Behind By
Reforming
Education with
Local Control***
- ***Keep Our
Nation's Promise
to Our Veterans***
- ***Fair Trade
for Better Jobs
and Wages***

Keep our Nation's Promise to our Veterans

"The sacred promise made by our country to young men and women in uniform on the front lines of protecting our nation's freedom must not be forgotten at times when our nation is at relative peace. The promise made must be a promise kept. It is not enough to merely appreciate with words on Veterans Day or prayers on Memorial Day. The sacrifice of our nation's veterans must be appreciated with deeds to honor their service."

Jim Nussle

AGENDA GOALS:

- 1. Ensure access to health benefits in Iowa**
- 2. Ensure fair treatment of Vets' claims in case-work**
- 3. Ensure access to disability benefits**
- 4. Improve educations benefits**

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Keep Our Nation's Promise To Our Veterans Agenda Legislation:

2002 Budget (H. CON Res. 83) (Congress passed on May 9 & 10, 2001)

- Provides record high levels of VA spending. (\$51.5 billion for veterans health care, education and other programs). 10.4 percent increase (\$4.8 billion) from FY 2001.
- Expands Servicemembers Group Life Insurance (SGLI) to include spouse and children.
- Extends last year's increase of the SGLI maximum (\$250,000) retroactively to October 1, 2000 to cover military personnel who have died in more recent service-connected tragedies.
- Increases burial and funeral allowances from \$1,500 to \$2,000 for veterans dying from service-connected conditions (\$300 to \$500 for other veterans).
- Doubles the burial plot allowance from \$150 to \$300
- Increase in monthly education benefits from \$650 to \$1100 over 3 years.

Cosponsored Legislation

- **H.R. 1351** - This bill would remove the unmarked restriction on Veterans grave markers. Currently, veteran graves are not allowed to obtain a veteran marker if they already have a private marker. This bill would allow veterans to receive veteran markers regardless of whether there is a current marker/headstone.
- **H.R. 435 - Veterans Outpatient Care Access Act of 2001** - This legislation directs the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to provide needed medical services from sources outside the Department of Veterans Affairs when veterans are informed that the waiting period for such services in a Department outpatient clinic will be six months or longer. Basically, if a veteran tries to get a doctor's appointment at a Veterans' Clinic and has to wait longer than six months, the Veterans' Department would be required to provide healthcare outside of the VA Clinic.
- **H.R. 1136** - This legislation would allow veterans to have prescriptions written by their personal physician to be filled by VA pharmacies.

Legislation Approved by House

- **H.R. 811 - Veterans Hospital Emergency Repair Act** - *Approved March 27th*. Authorized \$550 million over two years to repair dilapidated and obsolete VA medical facilities. (Status: Pending in Senate). VA Secretary may choose individual projects recommended by VA's capital investment board.
- **H.J.Res. 36 - Flag Desecration Amendment** - *Approved July 17th*. Proposes an amendment to the Constitution authorizing the Congress to prohibit the physical desecration of the U.S. flag.
- **H. Con. Res. 56** - *Approved May 21st*. Expresses the sense of the Congress regarding National Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day. The measure pays tribute to the United States citizens who died in the attack, and the members of the Pearl Harbor Survivors Association.

- **H.R. 1696** - *Approved by House and Senate and signed by President Bush on May 28th.*
This is an order to start construction of the World War II Memorial. Puts an end to years of delays by groups opposed to memorial for environmental reasons.
- **H.R. 1291 - 21st Century Montgomery GI Bill Enhancement Act** - *Approved by House on June 19th and accommodated in the FY 2002 budget.* The monthly education benefit would nearly double over three years, putting the dream of a college education within the reach of more veterans. The FY 2002 budget accommodates a three-year phased increase in monthly education benefits from \$650 to \$1100.
- **H.R. 801, the Veterans' Survivor Benefits Improvements Act of 2001** - *Accommodated in the FY 2002 budget* - Expands Servicemembers Group Life Insurance (SGLI) to include spouse and children, and extends last year's increase of the SGLI maximum (\$250,000) retroactively to October 1, 2000 to cover military personnel who have died in more recent service-connected tragedies. H.R. 801 also increases burial and funeral allowances from \$1,500 to \$2,000 for veterans dying from service-connected conditions (\$300 to \$500 for other veterans) and doubles the burial plot allowance from \$150 to \$300.
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- **H.R. 2540 - Veterans Benefits Act of 2001** - *Approved by House on July 31, 2001.* Among other provisions, this legislation extends the period for providing compensation to Persian Gulf veterans to December 31, 2003, so that newly eligible veterans have time to have their claims considered. H.R. 2540 also adds Type II diabetes to the list of diseases presumed to be service-connected in veterans of the Vietnam War that were exposed to Agent Orange and other herbicides. Additionally, H.R. 2540 gives the nation's over 2.3 million disabled veterans, or survivors of disabled veterans who receive compensation, a 2.7 percent cost-of-living adjustment, effective December 1st of this year. This means that disabled veterans would receive an additional \$2.7 billion in benefits over five years.
- **H.R. 2620 - Appropriations Act for the Department of Veterans Affairs for fiscal year (FY) 2002.**
Approved by House on July 30, 2001. The bill provides \$52.2 billion specifically for veterans' healthcare, housing and education, an 11% increase over FY 2001. Specifically, H.R. 2620 provides \$21.28 billion for medical care for eligible beneficiaries in VA facilities and \$27.5 billion for the Veterans Benefits Administration, including \$955 million to expedite claims processing.